

Conference Abstract

Biodiversity Data Management: Regional challenges

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Abstract

With over 8 million specimens of cultural and natural heritage in its custody, the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) are designated as the country's national repository. Reference collections are at the heart of the institutions' functions of preserving, studying, documenting and presenting past and present heritage for the purpose of enhancing knowledge, appreciation, respect and sustainable utilization of resources, nationally and globally.

In spite of its immense resource base and many success stories as a regional hub in heritage research, NMK acknowledges the limitations imposed by hitherto largely 'analogue' collections. For instance, a large percentage of the collections are yet to be digitised and therefore, information about them is not easily accessible to users outside the immediate research fraternity. This by extension means that more often than not, the investment made towards accumulation and management of data hardly ever finds its way beyond the storage cabinets and into the decision/policy making process. This obviously impedes NMK's and the country's contribution to the important global search for solutions to challenges in climate change and adaptation, human health, as well as food security.

In a number of pertinent Needs Assessments (NA) undertaken in the last decade, inadequate capacity for digitisation was identified as the single greatest impediment to heritage information transfer within NMK, Kenya and the vast East African region. This capacity relates to scarcity of both trained human resources, infrastructure such as computing/digitisation equipment, and clear and simple policy guidelines in relation to biodiversity data management and use. In a nutshell, the need to not only embrace but

understand innovative technologies and communication tools has been identified as being critical to addressing issues of unrealized research potential and boosting relevance to societal needs.

Nevertheless, there has been a concerted effort through various entities such as the project funded by the JRS Biodiversity Foundation on the development of Kenya's Biodiversity Atlas; an open access platform for hosting and supporting biodiversity data, the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) through the Biodiversity Information for Development (BID) programme with the aim of increasing the amount of biodiversity data available about a country so as to respond to national priorities and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development's (IGAD) Biodiversity Management Programme (BMP), whose main objective was to establish biodiversity databases, build technical capacity and digitise biodiversity collections so as to generate a map of biodiversity and other key information products for the IGAD Region.

Keywords

National Museums of Kenya, biodiversity informatics, biodiversity data management, regional challenges, Kenya, East Africa

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